



# How to make good decisions





بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful





Assalamu'alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatuhu,

We pray that this message reaches you  
in good health and imaan.

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May Allah make our paths toward seeking  
beneficial knowledge easy and kindle our hearts  
with sincerity and gratefulness  
towards Him.

Jazakumullahu Khayran



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# Glossary



جل جلاله | Jalla Jalāluhu  
**Allah the Most Exalted**



صلى الله عليه وسلم | Sallāllāhu Alayhi Wa Sallam  
**Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him**

# The Guidelines for Making Good Decisions

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*Chapter One*

There is no doubt that Allah ﷻ has revealed the means to achieve everything good, and set forth an example of the Prophet ﷺ for us. Decision-making is a common struggle across the ummah. We are constantly making choices about our affairs. It is important that we make use of the tools provided to us, and navigate these choices within the light of Islam.

Across these lessons, we will be breaking down the following hadith which comprehensively illustrates the guidelines for making good decisions:

1

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ " الْمُؤْمِنُ الْقَوِيُّ خَيْرٌ وَأَحَبُّ إِلَى اللَّهِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِ الضَّعِيفِ وَفِي كُلِّ خَيْرٍ آخِرٌ عَلَى مَا يَنْفَعُكَ وَاسْتَعِنْ بِاللَّهِ وَلَا تَعْجِزْ وَإِنْ أَصَابَكَ شَيْءٌ فَلَا تَقُلْ لَوْ أَنِّي فَعَلْتُ كَذَا وَكَذَا . وَلَكِنْ قُلْ قَدَرُ اللَّهِ وَمَا شَاءَ فَعَلَ فَإِنَّ لَوْ تَفْتَحُ عَمَلَ الشَّيْطَانِ

**Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Messenger of Allah (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) said: "A strong believer is better and dearer to Allah than a weak believer, and there is good in both. Be keen for what will benefit you, seek the help of Allah, and do not feel helpless. If something befalls you, do not say: 'Had I done such-and-such, it would be such-and-such.' Indeed, 'if' opens the way before the devil to act."**

Sahih Muslim 2664

# Defining Our Goals

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*Chapter Two*



In the aforementioned hadith, we are advised to “Be keen for what will benefit you”.

The initial step in the decision-making process is to assess your overall goals and establish what success truly means to you. It's simple enough to state that you have a particular objective, such as getting a specific job or making hijrah. But what is frequently ignored is taking the time to examine how accomplishing that goal would impact your worldly affairs and hereafter, the type of lifestyle you lead, and your daily routine. You must ask yourself if making this decision would satisfy what you're looking for, align with your needs, and bring you closer to your overarching aims.

Let's consider hijrah, for example, the decision to migrate to a Muslim country. Is moving to a Muslim country the ultimate goal, or do you want to reside in a Muslim country that reminds you of home, allows you to live comfortably, or provides avenues to study Islam? Defining what you want to accomplish and what benefits will come out of your choice will prevent regret in the long run and is the first step to gauging whether a decision is the right one for you.

When approaching this process, Islam always takes priority. Not only in terms of how the decision would impact your religion but also that what Islam *says* comes first.

Allah ﷻ says:

1 وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَىٰ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ ۗ وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا مُّبِينًا

**It is not for a believing man or woman—when Allah and His Messenger decree a matter—to have any other choice in that matter. Indeed, whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger has clearly gone ‘far’ astray.**

Surah Al-Ahzab 36

In a way, this simplifies your decision-making process. Whatever Islam advises will definitely be beneficial for you, and whatever is not recommended by Islam will not be good for you.

Allah ﷻ says:

2 أَلَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ خَلَقَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ

**Does He who created not know, while He is the Subtle, the All-Aware?**

Surah Al-Mulk 14

3 كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ وَهُوَ كُرْهٌ لَّكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تَكْرَهُوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ وَعَسَىٰ أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

**Fighting has been enjoined upon you while it is hateful to you. But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah knows, while you know not.**

Surah Al-Baqarah 216

As believers, we trust Allah has our best interests in mind, even if we don't always understand His plans. Therefore, our decision-making should always align with what Allah has revealed as permissible or impermissible. We must strive to avoid what is impermissible, while also fulfilling our obligations. Scholars say that istikhārah should not be used when it comes to fulfilling our obligations or avoiding haram actions.

It's also important to remember that if we sacrifice something for the sake of Allah, He will bless us with something even better. While we may not have control over what Allah has decreed, we do have a say in matters that fall within the realm of what is permissible.

# Balancing the Positives and Negatives of your Decisions

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*Chapter Three*

Now let's consider the balance between the positive and negative consequences, or the pros and cons, of your decision. If you think about it, if something is purely good, there's no decision to be made, and the same goes for something that's purely bad. Typically, big decisions involve both positive and negative aspects - things you hope to achieve and things you hope to avoid.

Allah ﷻ says:

1 سَأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ ۚ قُلْ فِيهِمَا إِثْمٌ كَبِيرٌ وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ وَإِثْمُهُمَا أَكْبَرُ مِنْ نَفْعِهِمَا ۚ وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا يُنْفِقُونَ قُلِ الْعَفْوَ ۚ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَفَكَّرُونَ

**“They ask you about wine and gambling. Say, ‘In them is great sin and [yet, some] benefit for people. But their sin is greater than their benefit.’ And they ask you what they should spend. Say, ‘The excess [beyond needs].’ Thus Allah makes clear to you the verses [of revelation] that you might give thought.”**

Surah Al-Baqarah 219

While Allah has decreed the issue in this statement and we have no say in it, it serves as an example of balancing the positives and negatives. Islam promotes or enhances good and reduces or eliminates evil.

Allah ﷻ says:

2 كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ ۚ وَلَوْ ءَامَنَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ ۚ مِّنْهُمْ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ

**You are the best community ever raised for humanity—you encourage good, forbid evil, and believe in Allah. Had the People of the Book believed, it would have been better for them. Some of them are faithful, but most are rebellious.**

Surah Ali ‘Imran 110

If the net result of your choice has more negatives than positives, it is best to turn away from it. However, if your choice has some negatives but the net result is positive, you should consider it. That being said, try to find ways to amplify the positives and minimize or eliminate the negative aspects of your choice whenever possible.

It is important to keep in mind that part of Allah's decree is that unless Allah bestows His mercy upon you, it is unlikely that you will find a situation without any negatives. This is simply a part of life. Do not let the inevitable challenges that come with your choice paralyze you. No matter what you do, you will always face tests in this life. So, be mindful of what will benefit you the most.

Allah ﷻ says:

3 لُّ نَفْسٍ ذَآئِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ ۚ وَنَبْلُوكُم بِالشَّرِّ وَالْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً ۚ وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ

**Every soul will taste death. And We test you ‘O humanity’ with good and evil as a trial, then to Us you will ‘all’ be returned.**

Surah Al-Anbiya 35



Therefore, the optimal method is to create a list or reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of your options, as well as strategies to maximize the benefits and minimize the drawbacks. When you have determined the most favourable option, that will serve as the foundation for proceeding with your decision.

# Seeking Allah's Guidance

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*Chapter Four*

By now, you should have a good sense of your goals and the direction you want to take. At this point, it's natural to still have some doubts or unanswered questions. This is where we can seek guidance from Allah, ideally something we should do from the outset.

In the previously mentioned hadith, the Prophet ﷺ advises us to:

- 1 **وَأَسْتَعِزْ بِاللَّهِ**  
**Seek the help of Allah.**

This is because, despite our confidence in our own reflection and planning, Allah always knows what is best.

Allah ﷻ says:

- 2 **كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقِتَالُ وَهُوَ كُرْهُ لَكُمْ وَعَسَى أَنْ تُحِبُّوا شَيْئًا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ**  
**Fighting has been made obligatory upon you 'believers', though you dislike it. Perhaps you dislike something which is good for you and like something which is bad for you. Allah knows and you do not know.**

Surah al Baqarah 216

The word "istikhārah" means to seek help in making a choice. However, it is often widely misunderstood. Many people do it at the wrong time, with the wrong intention, and they misinterpret the outcome. Doing istikhārah the right way is one of the most impactful practices that can benefit both our dunyā and ākhirah.

- 3 **عَنْ جَابِرٍ - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ - قَالَ كَانَ النَّبِيُّ ﷺ يُعَلِّمُنَا الْإِسْتِخَارَةَ فِي الْأُمُورِ كُلِّهَا كَالسُّورَةِ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ**  
**Jabir narrated: The Prophet ﷺ used to teach us the Istikhārah for each and every matter as he used to teach us the Surahs from the Holy Qur'an.**

Sahih al-Bukhari 6382

One common misconception about istikhārah is that it should only be used for significant decisions. In reality, istikhārah can be used for any matter except those that are mandatory or forbidden, as mentioned in the previous ahadith. This doesn't mean that you need to make istikhārah for every tiny decision in your daily life, but it is advisable to seek Allah's guidance for important choices. Typically, you perform istikhārah when you have a particular idea in mind. You can also perform istikhārah when you are unsure which direction to take, but usually, you approach istikhārah with a sense of direction.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

- 4 **حَدَّثَنَا قُتَيْبَةُ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنُ أَبِي الْمَوَالِي، عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ الْمُنْكَدِرِ، عَنْ جَابِرِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا - قَالَ كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يُعَلِّمُنَا الْإِسْتِخَارَةَ فِي الْأُمُورِ كَمَا يُعَلِّمُنَا السُّورَةَ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ يَقُولُ " إِذَا هَمَّ أَحَدُكُمْ بِالْأَمْرِ فَلْيَرْكَعْ رَكَعَتَيْنِ مِنْ غَيْرِ الْفَرِيضَةِ ثُمَّ لِيَقُلِ اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْتَخِيرُكَ بِعِلْمِكَ وَأَسْتَقْدِرُكَ بِقُدْرَتِكَ، وَأَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ فَضْلِكَ الْعَظِيمِ، فَإِنَّكَ تَقْدِرُ وَلَا أَقْدِرُ وَتَعْلَمُ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتَ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ، اللَّهُمَّ إِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ خَيْرٌ لِي فِي دِينِي وَمَعَاشِي وَعَاقِبَةِ أُمْرِي - أَوْ قَالَ عَاجِلِ أَمْرِي وَآجِلِهِ - فَاقْدُرْهُ لِي وَيَسِّرْهُ لِي ثُمَّ بَارِكْ لِي فِيهِ، وَإِنْ كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُ أَنَّ هَذَا الْأَمْرَ شَرٌّ لِي فِي دِينِي وَمَعَاشِي وَعَاقِبَةِ أُمْرِي - أَوْ قَالَ فِي عَاجِلِ أَمْرِي وَآجِلِهِ - فَاصْرِفْهُ عَنِّي وَاصْرِفْنِي عَنْهُ، وَقْدِرْ لِي الْخَيْرَ حَيْثُ كَانَ ثُمَّ أَرْضِنِي بِهِ - قَالَ - وَيُسَمِّي حَاجَتَهُ "**

**The Prophet ﷺ used to teach us the way of doing istikhārah (istikhārah means to ask Allah to guide one to the right sort of action concerning any job or a deed), in all matters as he taught us the Surahs of the Qur'an. He said, "If anyone of you thinks of doing any job he should offer a two rakat prayer other than the compulsory ones and say (after the prayer): (O Allah! I ask guidance from Your knowledge, And Power from Your Might and I ask for Your great blessings. You are capable and I am not. You know and I do not and You know the unseen. O Allah! If You know that this job is good for my religion and my subsistence and in my Hereafter--(or said: If it is better for my present and later needs)--Then You ordain it for me and make it easy for me to get, And then bless me in it, and if You know that this job is harmful to me In my religion and subsistence and in the Hereafter--(or said: If it is worse for my present and later needs)--Then keep it away from me and let me be away from it. And ordain for me whatever is good for me, And make me satisfied with it). The Prophet (ﷺ) added that then the person should name (mention) his need.**

Sahih al-Bukhari 1166

To perform the istikhārah prayer, start by offering two rakat of prayer other than the obligatory prayers. This could be a sunnah prayer or a prayer solely for istikhārah. If your case is not time-sensitive, avoid praying during the times in which it's prohibited to pray. These times include just before dhuhr, after asr, after fajr, in the ten to fifteen minutes that the sun is rising, or before maghrib in the ten to fifteen minutes that the sun is setting. Once you finish the prayer, recite the istikhārah dua.

One common misunderstanding about istikhārah is that it involves asking Allah to inspire you to make the correct decision. In reality, what you are actually requesting from Allah is for Him, through His knowledge and power, to decree the right decision and make it a reality. Although some people may wait for a sign or a feeling, what truly needs to be waited for is the decree of Allah. After performing istikhārah, one may experience a sense of inclination or disinclination toward their decision, but the ultimate outcome is what matters. It is important to remember that if your situation becomes difficult, it does not necessarily indicate the answer to your istikhārah. In such a case, you may want to perform istikhārah again and be persistent in pursuing your decision-making process. If the difficulty lasts and it appears that a particular option is no longer viable, that could be your answer. It is recommended to repeat the istikhārah until the matter becomes clear. Remember, whatever the outcome of your istikhārah may be, it will always be for your own good.



# Consulting Others Before Making a Decision

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*Chapter Five*

Allah ﷻ says:

1 وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ

**And those who have responded to their lord and established prayer and whose affair is [determined by] consultation among themselves, and from what We have provided them, they spend.**

Surah Ash-Shura 38

Consulting with others, known as *shura*, is an important aspect of decision-making. However, it's not as simple as holding a vote or asking others to decide for you. The correct approach involves seeking out the opinions of people who have relevant expertise and experience. These may include individuals with religious knowledge, those who have had similar experiences, or people who have specific insight into your life. In major decisions, it's wise to seek out multiple perspectives and carefully consider the advice of those you trust.

# Things to Avoid When Making a Decision

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*Chapter Six*

One of the first things we're advised against is mentioned in the initial hadith we cited:

## لَا تَعْجِزْ

### Do not feel helpless

Don't feel defeated, incapable, or as though you can't overcome obstacles. There are always opportunities available to us, even when they might not be immediately apparent. This dua sheds light on the things that hold us back and prevent us from moving forward:

1 اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنَ الْهَمِّ وَالْحُزْنِ، وَالْعَجْزِ وَالْكَسَلِ وَالْبُخْلِ وَالْجُبْنِ، وَضَلَعِ الدَّيْنِ وَغَلَبَةِ الرِّجَالِ

**O Allah, I seek refuge in you from grief and sadness, from weakness and from laziness, from miserliness and from cowardice, from being overcome by debt and overpowered by men (i.e. others).**

Al-Bukhari 7/158

Remember the statement of Allah:

2 وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا

**“And whosoever fears Allah and keeps his duty to Him, He will make a way for him to get out (from every difficulty).**

Surah At-Talaq 2

It's important to avoid hasty decision-making, as it can hinder our ability to make sound judgments and lead to regret later on. Instead, we should strive to approach matters calmly and take as much time as we need to make informed choices.

Another pitfall to avoid is second-guessing ourselves. Rather than dwelling on what could have been, we should trust in Allah and accept that sometimes things don't work out the way we hoped. Do not say “If only I did this it would’ve been like that”. This opens doors to the shaytan. Instead, say “Qadr Allah wa maa sha’a faal”, “Allah has decreed and whatever he wills, He does”. If we still have options, we can seek counsel and guidance through istikhārah, and make changes to our decisions without rushing or flip-flopping between options.

When evaluating our choices, it's important to consider our ultimate investment in our akhirah, or our hereafter. If we realize that a particular decision is not serving our best interests, we should not hesitate to re-evaluate and take proactive steps to make changes. This may involve starting the istikhārah process again to seek guidance from Allah.





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